

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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TAGS: ENRG, TECH, BEMP, UK

SUBJECT: STATUS REPORT ON PROSPECTIVE HMG NUCLEAR
REACTOR CHOICE

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY
ERIC VARLEY RECENTLY ANNOUNCED THAT A FORMAL PARLIAMEN-
TARY DEBATE ON NUCLEAR REACTOR CHOICE ISSUE WILL BE
HELD BEFORE EASTER, PRESUMABLY AFTER APRIL 2 MEETING
OF HIS NUCLEAR POWER ADVISORY COMMITTEE. VARLEY GAVE
NO INDICATION HOWEVER AS TO WHEN FINAL HMG DECISION
WILL BE MADE. VARLEY HAS REFRAINED FROM TAKING PUBLIC
POSITION EXCEPT FOR SPONTANEOUS REMARK, IN REPLY TO
PRESS QUERY, THAT HE WAS "A GREAT SUPPORTER OF BRITISH
TECHNOLOGY."

2. DURING PAST TWO MONTHS PRESS REPORTING AND
COMMENTARY HAS CONTINUED TO FOCUS LARGELY ON LWR SAFETY
ISSUES, PARLIAMENTARY AND SCIENTIFIC ESTABLISHMENT
SUPPORT FOR BRITISH TECHNOLOGY AND ALLEGED MERITS OF
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SGHWR-CABU COLLABORATION.

3. WEEK OF MARCH 17, HOWEVER, PRESS HAS PUBLISHED BRITISH GENERAL ELECTRIC COMPANY (GEC) PLANS FOR ENTERING INTO THREE WAY (US-UK-FRANCE) NUCLEAR "CLUB" WHICH WOULD PROVIDE BRITISH INDUSTRY WITH SUBSTANTIAL EXPORT MARKET FOR MANUFACTURE OF NUCLEAR REACTOR COMPONENTS. MOST ARTICLES REFER TO GE AND COMBUSTION ENGINEERING PROPOSALS BUT EMPHASIZE PREFERENCE OF SIR ARNOLD WEINSTOCK, GEC CHIEF EXECUTIVE, FOR WESTINGHOUSE-SPONSORED DEAL WITH CREUSOT-LOIRE AND FRAMATOME AND CONSTRUCTION OF UK FACILITY MODELLED ON PENSACOLA FACILITY. ARTICLES UNDERLINE THAT APPROVAL OF EXPORT DEAL IS CONTINGENT UPON HMG DECISION IN FAVOR OF WESTINGHOUSE PWR FOR BRITAIN.

4. MARCH 21 FINANCIAL TIMES ARTICLE BY DAVID FISHLOCK PROVIDING EXCELLENT ROUNDUP OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN UK NUCLEAR DEBATE IS BEING FORWARDED BY AIRGRAM. END UNCLASSIFIED.

5. BEGIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. COMMENT: PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE IS APT TO ENGENDER LITTLE SUPPORT FOR US LWRS AS CONTRASTED TO SGHWRS OR CANDU. NONETHELESS, SHOULD HMG THEREAFTER DECIDE IN FAVOR OF LWRS, IT COULD ARGUE THAT DECISION WAS MADE ONLY AFTER FULL PUBLIC DEBATE HAD TAKEN PLACE. KEY QUESTION MAY WELL BE WHETHER LATEST INITIATIVE BY GEC CAN CONVINCE HMG, INDUSTRIAL ESTABLISHMENT AND LABOR UNIONS THAT UK MUST RELY ON WELL-ESTABLISHED MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUES DEVELOPED IN US OVER 20 YEAR PERIOD IF BRITAIN IS TO PARTICIPATE IN LARGE SCALE PRODUCTION FOR EXPORT AS WELL AS GENERATE CHEAPER ELECTRICITY FOR DOMESTIC MARKET.

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